

Interview mit Prof. Eyal Weizman, Gründer und Leiter von Forensic Architecture

Eyal Weizman ist Architekt, Professor für Spatial and Visual Cultures und Direktor des Centre for Research Architecture am Goldsmiths, University of London. Das Interview führte Dagmar Boedicker anlässlich seines Gesprächs mit Stephan Trüby am 24.10.2017 in München in der Lothringer-13-Halle, Titel: „On the NSU Complex, Forensic Architecture and the Potentials of Architecture Theory“. Leider war nicht genug Zeit für eine Übersetzung, deshalb hier der leicht gekürzte und überarbeitete Text im Original. Wir danken Eyal Weizman und Forensic Architecture für das Interview und die Genehmigungen für die Bilder. © Forensic Architecture, wo nicht anders angegeben.



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F1fF: You describe buildings as agents, assemblies of structures, spaces, infrastructure, services, and technologies with a certain capacity to act and interact with their surroundings. As such, buildings and even entire cities become agents at the service of these organizations that collect information, be they public or private. Is there a relation between the IoT, smart cities, and contemporary warfare?

Eyal Weizman: The IoT seems like a pretty benign sort of concept that is anyway already in operation. From the smallest scale and, as you think up, on your computer or your smartphone and whatever else appliances you have, you can kind of extend it to the smart city. If you think about contemporary warfare, that is where the smart city concept is at its most extreme and most pronounced way.

What is called network-centric warfare is a way in which the relationships between various dispersed individual groups across a deep battlefield are networked into each other electronically, whether they are individual ground-based units, some drone operators, some command-and-control flying in the skies, some bombers, artillery on the side and whatever else you have. Not simply in being able to communicate with each other as was the case already since the Blitzkrieg years, where a synchronization between armor and air force was allowing war to escalate and accelerate. In fact in a multisensorial way, as a communication between sensors that bypass any direct human intelligence and instinct, so that the presence of units on the ground is fed into a kind of database that every shot that is fired, every missile that is fired, is understood by the entire system as to how much more needs to be fired. Has this unit or this swarm of drones run out of ammunition in relation to how many targets there are on the ground? That would feed back into command and raise another swarm or another couple of drones or aircraft.

In fact it is a kind of synchronization in which the images that travel from one unit to the other are not even images that are to be seen by people. When we think about image, we think, even if it's a digital image, that at some point we are going to be facing a three dimensional composition and it is going to mean something to us. But today's images are simply a way in which one machine intelligence is communicating with another. These are images that never externalize themselves in a way that human perception could actually follow them. The real *machinique image* you don't even see, because the other computer does not need to externalize it in a way to simulate the visual perception. So it is not only – you know, as Harun Farocki was speaking about in his work – *machinique* images. Then there is always something you see. You see people shopping or driving or you see battlefield images.

In a sense I would say that the first development of a smart city concept is an urban warfare concept, is the moment that war enters the city, is where you have a use for a dispersed networked, multisensorial and data-sharing system. When you look at (I am now referring to work by a student of mine on Gaza) the way in which the management of Gaza operates right now, that it is, according to him, *the smartest city*. In Gaza! How could that be conceived? – If you think of a smart city you would say maybe Dubai or somewhere else in the Gulf. You would say, these are the ultimate smart cities.

In fact, every building project that is happening in Gaza requires an electronic authorization by the Israelis sitting outside the envelope. Somebody is saying: I need to rebuild two stories of my building. So you upload into the system the pictures of two destroyed rooms that you have. That translates itself to quantities of concrete and that gives an order to a depot to release that through a humanitarian truck that would enter and they would count exactly how much concrete you need. So (for the Israelis) you would supposedly not dig a tunnel or fortify some military things. This is multiplied by the number of needs: from medicine to foodstuff, to building material, that come in and out. And that is being mobilized almost like some kind of Amazon shop-logic of infrastructural dissemination of objects, according to the perceived needs and control of the occupier.

So that's the smart cities I know: The smart city of Raqqa, the smart city of Mossul, the smart city of Aleppo. A bunch of data points that continuously move in and become points for the drawing of information.

F1fF: You wrote that urban warfare is political in the sense of wanting to influence, to win over the civilian population. Is there a connection to be drawn between urban warfare and crowd control?

Eyal Weizman: It just goes to say that urban warfare is intensely political because the battlefield happens within the political space *per se*, within the urban public domain. In fact, every war that is not a total war, that does not seek the complete physical annihilation of a group, is about communication, because the communication is in the level of violence I apply and the level of violence I *could* apply. That gap keeps the dialog. I can say: I could still make things worse. So you have a threat. If you work on maximum violence there is no longer communication.

Therefore everything that happens there is a political move of persuasion, of terror, terrorism and terrorizing. A lot of what is happening there and would be seen as simply pure violence are also acts of communication and attempts to convince the civilian population. You can convince the civilian population not to collaborate with the militant groups that are against you, let's say by scaring them. You say: If you do that, we'll kill you. Or if you do that, we will apply higher levels of violence than what is currently applied. Or you can do it by saying: Well, if you collaborate with us, we will rebuild the city and put in infrastructure, electricity will be better. There will be water again, the hospitals will work etc. So this works in different ways but we need to understand that when you are talking about urban warfare you are talking about a language, you are talking about a war that is about communication.

FifF: *Do you see a threat of crowd control measures due to successful surveillance?*

Eyal Weizman: I think like you that the minute the technology exists as a possibility, as a potential, it will be used at some point. Whether immediately on one's own citizens, whether in a frontier, whether it will be used at a border on refugees or whether it will be used in other countries. When things get developed they are used. There is very little bombs that simply rot in their storage and similarly very few techniques of population control that finally don't get there.

What is happening now on the borders of Europe, you know yourself. Few refugees have been allowed in, and Europe is now paying Libyan militia to effectively kill people before they get to the coast. So they don't get to the Mediterranean, they don't drown, so activists cannot detect them and save them. They are basically being killed in the Sahara. Or being put in camps that are horrific. What is that if not population control on a global scale? Control of movement, flow, congregation etc. That is the principle of population control. You can think of it in a city, you can think of it on a continental or intercontinental scale.

FifF: *Is sousveillance practical? Do you consider countersurveillance a feasible strategy for peaceful resistance?*

Eyal Weizman: Yes. We call sousveillance a different way, we simply use the term counterforensics. It's in debt to *Allan Secula*, who in one of his essays on photography proposed counterforensics as civil society's turn of the forensic gaze on states. Forensics is what states do, forensics is the act of surveillance and control, using also the form of biometrics etc. Counterforensics has two components to it: One is camouflage from state forensics, and the other the exposing of state crimes. Those two elements are entangled and both of them are essential.

Every form of control has its own forensic capacity, that is, capacity to survey. And they lead to counterforensic capacities, that are simultaneously about escaping the gaze of the state and about exposing the secrets of that organization, say military or police, that wants to hide its information from you. Because that information contains their own crimes or misdeeds.

Any data-rich system, military system, is vulnerable also. It's vulnerable initially to being hacked. It's vulnerable to forms of digital camouflage. So if the optics is not for the eye, if the sensorium operates in a different way, you can camouflage to that particular sensor. An example would be that people now camouflage against face recognition. If you understand how the algorithm works, you know that putting a beauty spot on your face or just clipping something very small on the skin of your face, although it would not work on the human eye, it might work on an algorithm, so it is a camouflage to that algorithm.

FifF: *Could there be such a thing as privacy by design of cities?*

Eyal Weizman: I suppose you need to think about a building as a relationship between its materiality and the medium in which it is captured. When you speak about surveillance, when you speak about warfare, there is a mode of capture, usually media technology, digital technology that need to register that building. So if you only think of buildings, as they do sometimes, not always, in architectural profession, as simply material things, there is very little you can do. You can design it like this or like that, with smaller windows etc. But what is interesting is precisely the relationship between the media of capture, e.g. satellite images. Then you are speaking about anything from the size of the pixels (this is something I have written about) to the remote sensing capacity, to seeing buildings as heat sources. Or whether it is how social media capture a building. What can you tell from the way in which a digital optical sensor registers a material concrete thing? We can see a lot in there. It is not that you see it in the building, you see it in the relationship between the building and the media.

So we could see for example the contours, so to say the *shadow* of bodies by analyzing the shrapnel on a wall. A lot of our work is about the relation between the media and matter. This image is a combination of hundreds of frames composed into a room and then we are looking at the shrapnel in the wall and see that there are two areas where there is no shrapnel and where the two people died. That result came as a relationship between media and architecture.

FifF: *Climate change and IT-vulnerabilities, both prevent peoples' ability to influence and devise their preferences and lives. Do you see a parallel?*

Eyal Weizman: We are coming from conflict analysis, from human rights work, to climate change. There is one great lack in climate change discussion. In human rights analysis we have stopped believing long ago in the category of *collateral damage*, right? The military say, we bombed these people, the enemy, and that bridge collapsed, those schools were hit and those civilians died etc. We did not intend it. That idea is very much discredited. Human rights groups do not accept this term.

Die Dokumentation des Falls Miranshah, auf den sich E. Weizman bezieht

Ort ist Miranshah, Nord-Wasiristan, Pakistan. FA rekonstruierte die Schrapnell-Einschläge durch Überlagerung der Einzelbilder aus einem herausgeschmuggelten und von MSNBC ausgestrahlten Video.



Abbildung 1: Ort des Drohnenangriffs, Video MSNBC



Abbildung 2: Einschlag des Drohnen-Geschosses im Hausdach, bevor es im Inneren explodierte

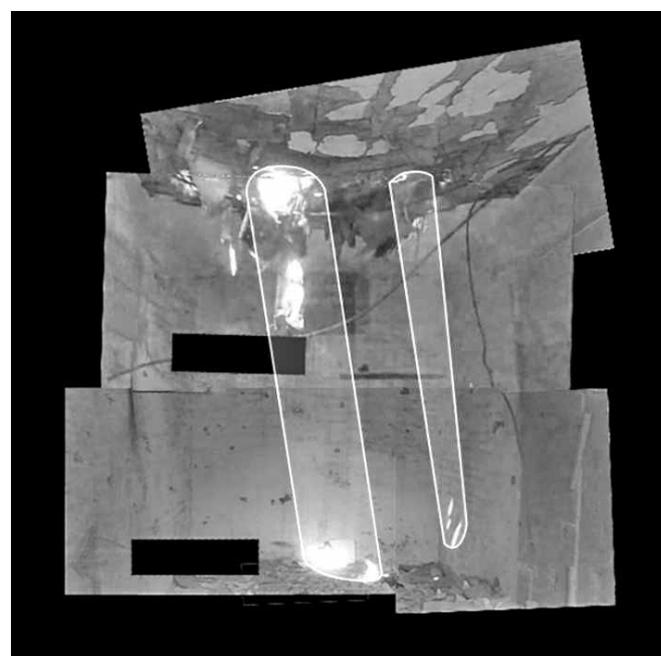


Abbildung 3: Innenraum nach der Explosion mit Schrapnell-Einschlägen, Video MSNBC

Abbildung 4: Innenraum mit Spuren der Einschläge und vermuteten Schatten der Opfer

But environmental groups do accept the idea of climate change being collateral damage of modernity. That is to say: No-one really wanted it, we tried to do good things. Move from one place to the other, enrich ourselves with technology, and well, shit happens: The climate changes. But if you take a colonial point of view of climate thinking, you realize a few things. First it is that from the 18th century, the first uses of the term climate change are meant as a project rather than as a collateral damage: Climate is what we need to change! The Americans in the west, the Australians, the Europeans conquering the orient after the first world war, want to change the climate and they change it intentionally. They try to change it intentionally by playing around with water, moving it from place to place, by playing around with flora, by cutting forests etc. By burning forests. As a project with the idea of controlling the climate, in a Faustian way. This is what I see in the area that I come from, Palestine. The climate has always been the second stage of occupation. You occupy a place, then you need to turn it fertile. In order to do this you need to make the desert bloom. What is that but climate change as a project? And what is its implication if not displacement of indigenous people? But it is not only Israel – Palestine, it's all across the colonial world where climate experiments were actually being conducted. Always on the back of the indigenous people living there. So I think we need to, first of all, understand the origin of the term climate change, understand the struggles involved in it, when we develop techniques to confront it. Because when something is not a collateral, it is not simply about an economy of more or less, like: Can we trade this for that, carbon for money, a few centimeters of sea level in exchange for something, etc.? We need to confront it on a much deeper political level, that is to do with the way that colonization shaped and reshaped the materiality and weather cycles of the planet. This is a big story, it is at the scale of the earth.

Attacker and attacked are not equally affected. It is happening all the time in climate change, people are dying because of much more intense weather cycles. The people that are paying the price are not only, but primarily, most vulnerable sections of society.

But no, the parallel to ICT does not occur to me right away.

Fiff: *There were big expectations concerning the democratic potential of Internet, transparency, two-way communication, ...*

Eyal Weizman: I don't think it is the right relation to politics to say, something will just come down from heaven. It is messianic to declare, OK, now we have the Internet and that will democratize society. Everything is a struggle. The Internet in itself can benefit corporations, can and does benefit military and the police and benefit surveillance and whatever. You need to continuously struggle on every point, turn it against and create vulner-

abilities. Where there is strength there is always vulnerabilities and one needs to identify them in order to know how to act.

In our work we always map the situation because we have very limited resources. We see where the state, whether it is here in Germany or elsewhere, where the Verfassungsschutz or the police is most vulnerable. They were most vulnerable in the Kassel NSU case. This is why we put all our energy and all our money exactly where it hurts. Where we could achieve some results. Again, everything is continuously a struggle.

Fiff: *Please tell us a little about Forensic Architecture's open-source software called PATTRN¹, a crowd-sourced platform that allows activists to upload information and then map relations between discrete events, identifying patterns and trends in time and space.*

Eyal Weizman: The important thing: The field now is about what we may call future forensics. What evidence could we see at present, not for things that happened in the past, but for a thing that may happen in the future? How can you invert the forensic temporality? One of the ways to do it is looking for patterns of behavior that would qualify. And everybody is in this game – the military etc. Say, if somebody is booking tickets with that particular credit card to that particular place and makes three phone calls to these numbers and visits this place of worship and has this language, no? Boom! Right? They will be arrested or worse.

For us it is to identify vulnerabilities before they emerge. How can you see patterns of activities by militaries that show in operative order and standard operative procedure that is not open? So you can actually reverse-engineer command by looking at patterns of actions, patterns of relations between soldiers, for example. That medical facilities would be struck in a constellation where, say, as we discovered, soldiers were being captured by the enemy group. And then we can deduce from it, we can see the future in a very blurred line. It is nothing certain, it's always fuzzy, you always see blurry contours but you can predict and you can plan. And you can devise strategies based on patterns. Pattrn is a kind of mathematical phenomenon, it does not have a privileged position in time, it can go backwards and forwards. And that is a way in which we undertake predictions, whether it is on where migrants would be intercepted, what is the next village that could suffer an attack, or which facility would be the most dangerous one and how to plan for this.

Fiff: *Thank you very much for your time.*

Anmerkungen und Referenzen

¹ PATTRN is available at: <http://pattrn.co/> (abgerufen 28.11.2017)

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